

# Committee on Resources

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Testimony of:

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Subcommittee on National Parks,

Recreation, and Public Lands

Legislative Field Hearing on H.R. 1442

It is a distinct honor to be at Washington's most visited Memorial — a most compelling and logical place to discuss the reasons for H.R. 1442 and to address the issue in its entirety.

A Visitor Center will transform the Memorial into a profound learning experience for America's youth and others who desire the optional experience of the Center. Exhibits such as photos of those who are on The Wall, with skilled educators on hand, will engage them. There will be memorable displays of both the Vietnam War and of historic events that have taken place at the most visited Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Young people will gain a better understanding of a Memorial that is now older than they are. Further, the Center will help them to gain a better appreciation for their visits to the other memorials they will see during their time in Washington. These memorials all honor service to our great nation, service that has kept our country free.

I will let others speak of the compelling case for the Visitor Center here to serve the public. My remarks will address another significant matter — architectural excellence.

I last testified before this committee in March 2000 on the issue of PL 106-214 creating a plaque honoring veterans who have died prematurely due to their service. We expressed reservations about the precedent, but gave our support for the bill with the proviso that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund put together a design team to assure the highest standards of architectural excellence be placed into the project.

We did just that. Exhibits 1-A and 1-B are drawings of the design by architects JC Cummings, George Dickey and Henry Arnold. These architects were paid by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund to obtain this striking design. Our architects obtained approval from all the relevant agencies. We look forward to its dedication. We simply are awaiting a construction permit. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will put into place the funding, if needed, to complete this task.

Let me also point out that the Senate is considering S.296. A Hearing will consider this bill on June 3, 2003. The bill calls for adding new names to the Memorial — more names than can fit. This legislation, and the Plaque legislation, are metaphors for others desiring a presence at the site of The Wall.

This phenomenon is yet another reason for the Visitor Center where different groups - including CIA agents, Red Cross Workers and those who are the subject of S296 can be recognized.

A brilliant scheme of lighting for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been designed and we have received all approvals. It was the last issue that the respected Fine Arts Chairman J. Carter Brown was personally involved with. We are merely awaiting a construction permit. The lighting scheme will cost about \$350,000

to install and will be paid for by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. We have already given over \$75,000 to the National Park Service to help them pay their contractor. I note this as an example of our 20 years of cooperation with the National Park Service in addressing the needs here at The Wall. Until the new lighting system has been installed, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will pay lighting specialists, Power Solutions, to maintain the lights on a weekly basis. Every week since Spring 2002, our electricians visit The Wall to make sure that each and every light is functioning properly. We have been paying for this ongoing maintenance for over a year.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is honored to have been selected to provide advice to the planned World Trade Center Memorial. I am proud to say that their design competition is modeled precisely after the competition for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Again, this exemplifies our dedication and reputation for architectural excellence. Exhibit 2 is a letter expressing appreciation for our efforts with the World Trade Center Memorial. We also have provided advice to the Oklahoma City Memorial, the National Law Officers Memorial and to the World War II Memorial as well.

I am honored to have the support of the Bush Administration for the Visitor Center. In a letter I received in February 2002 (Exhibit 3), National Park Service Director Fran Mainella, whose late husband was a Vietnam veteran, wrote: "For 20 years we have worked together with you to support your efforts to increase visitor awareness and understanding of the war and its national significance and we look forward to working with you in the future. We are very supportive of the concept to develop an underground facility to accomplish a continuation of these efforts..."

I now call to your attention Exhibit 4. This shows a huge corrugated aluminum building in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial. How could something like this be on our nation's Mall?

Exhibit 5 is a soda stand – about 200 yards from where we sit today. The rusting roof is unsightly. Yet this structure is on the Mall. These photos were taken at 10:00 a.m. on May 9, 2003.

Exhibit 6 is a tourmobile stand — unused sitting in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial.

Exhibits 7, 8, 9 and 10 are vending areas – which have achieved a permanent status at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. They stay in place 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Exhibit 11 is a legal opinion showing how their rights as demonstrators can be protected, while allowing the National Park Service to require each vendor stand to leave at the end of the day.

Exhibit 12 shows the plan for a visitor center at the Washington Monument. This impacts in a significant manner historic sightlines of the Mall. The glass area over the Mall also will impact pedestrian traffic. I enter this exhibit into the record as an example of what is acceptable and enthusiastically endorsed by the National Park Service.

Exhibit 13 illustrates the Mall area and the Structures therein near the Lincoln, Korean and Vietnam Veterans Memorials. These drawings are done as close to scale as possible to show what is acceptable on the Mall. This provides context to illustrate the minimal impact of the Visitor Center.

Exhibits 14, 15 and 16 show the actual Visitor Center as envisioned in operation — with people being educated.

As you can plainly see the Visitor Center at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is diametrically opposed to the low standards of the exhibits you have just reviewed. Nor will it impact the historic sightlines like the structure planned for the Washington Monument. The Center will be beautiful – as should every structure on the Mall. The underground facility will be 10,000 square feet and will provide a profound educational experience for visitors who desire this optional experience — especially young Americans.

Of course, there will be an aboveground component to allow ingress and egress of the visitors. Architect William Lecky who brought about the Korean and Vietnam Veterans Memorials is enthusiastic to begin work. With the use of earth tone colors and proper landscaping, there will be minimal impact — unlike the structure in the historic vista of the Washington Monument. This minimal impact will be far exceeded by the educational impact for those like these youngsters here today. Again I call your attention to Exhibit 13 which shows the scale of structures in existence today.

Just as we built the Memorial with private funding, so too, shall we do so for the Visitor Center. We also will

maintain the center to spare the government any financial expense. A 20-year lease is in the legislation to be reviewed at 7-year intervals. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund will staff and maintain the Center pursuant to a memorandum of understanding with the Secretary of the Interior with whom we will share it for joint purposes including agreed upon uses for National Park Service staff. Examples of this arrangement and cooperation between federal agencies and the private sector abound. In the Lincoln Memorial — near his statue — is a bookstore. Ford's Theater has a museum and has plays that are shown to the public almost daily. Go to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial to see a large bookstore/visitor center — a truly integral component of the visitor experience — yet of minimal educational value due to its commercial nature.

For your consideration we have enclosed an independent survey (Exhibit 17) showing the overwhelming support for the Visitor Center by the American public. As Exhibit 18 we have also enclosed Echoes From The Wall, a curriculum package sent to each of America's high schools and middle schools by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. The Visitor Center is an extension of our mission to the young people who will one day lead our great nation.

Let us not forget the profound importance of today's hearing. We must reach out to America's youth from a place where they can be visually, intellectually and emotionally engaged. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is such a unique place. Your decision to allow this long delayed Visitor Center will go a long way toward this goal, a goal that veterans' groups, educators, journalists and the American public strongly supports.

I end my remarks today by pointing out that this effort has gone on for three years. This bill was ready for passage in October 2000, but was taken off the Unanimous Consent Calendar by one Senator. In May 2001, the bill was again on the Unanimous Consent Calendar. Former Oklahoma Congressman J.C. Watts, Jr. awaited the bill — again the Legislation was removed from the Unanimous Consent Calendar. For Memorial Day 2003 again Congressman Watts awaited Senate passage. Again the bill was not allowed to come to the Floor for a vote. Despite months of efforts by Senators Chuck Hagel (R-NE), John Warner (R-VA), John McCain (R-AZ), John Kerry (D-MA), Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) and others, the Legislation failed to come to a vote. Thousands of individual Americans, educators, school kids, prominent CEOs and respected military leaders petitioned Congress — to no avail.

We learned a great deal. One profound lesson was to begin this effort in the House of Representatives. We are grateful to the Members of this Committee and their staff. Chairman Pombo looked at the facts surrounding the Visitor Center. He decided that the time had come to allow democracy and the will of the people to prevail. My thanks to him and to Congressman Rahall for making this day come to pass.

I thank you, our Vietnam veterans thank you and our nation's young people thank you.

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